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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted to determine the attitudes of undergraduate education students regarding the importance of experiences with children and to examine the effects of age, prior experiences with children, and class standing on their attitudes. The purpose of this study was to seek an appropriate balance among field experiences, methods, content, and theory in teacher programs. The preference of students was found to vary according to age and experience. They perceived method and content to be more important elements of a methods course than theory and field experiences. Implications for schools of education are discussed. (JD)

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AGE AND EXPERIENCE AS FACTORS AFFECTING STUDENT ATTITUDES TOWARD EXPERIENCE-BASED TEACHER TRAINING PROGRAMS

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Methods courses offered in undergraduate teacher education programs have been characteristically designed to include theory, content and methods. Standards developed for professional teacher education programs by state and national agencies have required field experiences to aid in the application and integration of concepts believed necessary for teachers. As more extensive field experiences have been incorporated into teacher education programs, there has arisen some concern among faculty and students regarding what might be the appropriate balance among field experiences, methods, content and theory in the preparation programs.

Problem

The purposes of this study were: (1) to determine the attitudes of undergraduate education students regarding the importance of experiences with children and (2) to examine the affects, if any, of age, prior experiences with children and class standing on their attitudes.

This paper presents stated attitudes of 103 undergraduate education students toward the importance of the four components of an education methods course and identifies the possible effects of age, past experience and class standing on their attitudes toward the significance of working with children.

Procedures

During the past two summers many education students at The University of Texas at Arlington have been participating in an experience-based teacher education program known as Summer Adventure In Learning (SAIL). At the end of the second summer session, 1979, education students were asked to provide information about their age, extent of past experience with students, and whether they were graduate students, undergraduates or candidates for additional certification. They were also asked to make choices on a set of paired comparisons in which they evaluated the importance of method, content, field experiences, and theory to them in the methods courses in which they had enrolled. They were also asked to complete a value rating section where they indicated the relative importance of each of the four course components on a five point Likert-type scale ranging from very unimportant to very important.

Frequencies were computed for the paired comparison section and the priorities indicated in the value rating section were compared. A one way analysis of variance was used to compare the possible effects of age, previous experience with students and class standing on the student perspectives of importance of method, content, field experience and theory.

Results

The preference of students was found to vary according to age and experience. No matter how students were grouped, they perceived method and content to be more important elements of a methods course than theory and field experiences.

Differences in the perceived significance of field experience and theory in methods occurred when students were viewed by age and amount of past experience. Older education students and those who had prior experiences with children placed less importance on field experience and greater importance on learning theory. An examination of student mean scores relative to the importance of field experiences resulted in significant differences by age ($N=103$, $df=104$, p .05); past experience with students ($N=103$, $df=104$, p .05); and, class standing ($N=104$, $df=106$, p .01).

Implications

It appears that the developmental needs of professional teacher education students determines the significance perceived of four elements of a methods course, field experience, content, methods, learning theory. Undergraduate students who are younger and have had less experience with children tend to have more positive attitudes toward field experiences included in the methods courses as compared with less interest in theory emphases. Graduate students and undergraduate students who are older and have

had more experiences with children are more interested in theory and do not perceive the field experience component of a methods course to be as important to meet their needs.

Several implications may be drawn from these results. Teacher educators might consider how to apply the concept of individualization more extensively to professional preparation programs. Current survey data show that more mature students are now enrolling on college campuses, many who have had some type of experience with children, in the home or in some career position. Their needs are different from those of the nineteen-year-old undergraduate who has no past experiences. Professional programs need to provide for the professional growth of these candidates, no matter what their experiential background. Those students with extensive experiences might be placed in settings with children where they are to focus on the application of specific theory.

Also, the teacher education student concern with need for more content might be addressed in the development of the degree plan. The careful selection of general education courses from liberal arts and science can support education methods courses and strengthen the knowledge base of prospective teachers.